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Chemical-plant security is formula for disaster

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Chemical-plant security in this post-9/11 age is too vital a national concern to be left to the whims of individual states or chemical producers. Tough and uniform federal standards are long overdue. A new study released this week underscores that fact and the obligation of Congress to take corrective action.

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According to the Congressional Research Service, using Environmental Protection Agency data, more than 100 plants across the nation — and a fair number in New Jersey — still lack the safeguards considered sufficient to protect against a deadly attack.

The need to better assess and improve the security of chemical facilities is of particular importance to Middlesex County and its environs, one of the most active chemical-processing regions in the United States.

Depending on the material and volume involved, an incident at a single plant could affect tens of thousands or even millions of people.

Knowing the ruthless and cunning nature of terrorist operatives, this is a threat that can't be allowed to go unchecked.

New Jersey's U.S. Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg have been hounding Homeland Security to draw up tighter regulations for several years. In the wake of this week's report, each renewed his offensive. Corzine put it best, noting, "These reports now stretch back more than five years . . . warning that the risk of terrorists attempting to cause an industrial chemical accident is both real and credible."

New Jersey needs two things: the reinforced standards and adequate federal dollars to get them implemented. Both are late.

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